

## A STRANGER'S SMILE

A man once told me how it happened  
that a stranger's smile saved his life.  
He had gone out, he said, to walk in a park,  
to try to take hope from the rooted trees,  
the all-allowing water of the lake,  
a noisy bird,  
the sky whole and abiding,  
sky unconvinced by clouds—  
anything to stay him,  
so forsaken was his soul.

He said maybe the live black turmoil of a storm,  
not even a rainbow, just pounding rain—  
thunder might have spoken to him,  
telling of what comes and goes  
and what remains.  
But the sky hung blank,  
the light a powdery oxide  
known only elsewhere in its elemental state  
and the lake was sour pewter,  
cold and still as ice.

Walking toward him came a woman  
and just as they passed he met her eyes—  
eyes already raised to his—  
and she smiled.  
He was as if naked so maybe now  
he couldn't help but feel the warmth of her smile.  
He had nothing else, you see, and yet  
who can explain it?

The mystery of being touched.

He wanted us all, he said,  
to know the power of that stranger's smile,  
how inarguably it spoke, telling him:  
Be, live,  
go on and day by day  
leave your footprints on the earth.